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## Southeast Asia: Sources of Regime Support

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# SOUTHEAST ASIA: SOURCES OF REGIME SUPPORT

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The concept of regime legitimacy is central to understanding modern political life. All modern political regimes depend on the public's willing acquiescence and support in order to survive and function well. As Bruce Gilley has persuasively argued, regimes that lack legitimacy must devote more resources to maintaining their rule and fewer to effective governance, thereby reducing support and making them vulnerable to overthrow or collapse.<sup>1</sup> Although it may seem counterintuitive, all sorts of regimes may benefit from some measure of popular support, not just democracies—a fact often overlooked by theories that focus exclusively on democratization.<sup>2</sup> In this essay, we use the latest wave of the Asian Barometer Survey (ABS) to identify the sources of regime support in Southeast Asia within a comprehensive framework that takes into account ongoing theoretical debates as well as the regional context.<sup>3</sup>

Normative political theory typically expects democratic regimes to enjoy greater popular legitimacy than do authoritarian regimes because democracy is built on the consent of the governed and universal suffrage. Yet ample survey data have shown that diffuse popular support for the regime varies considerably across democracies, and the observed level of regime legitimacy in nondemocratic regimes is sometimes considerably higher than in emerging democracies.<sup>4</sup> Recent efforts to understand these puzzling data have yielded two different explanations.

The first suggests that regime legitimacy is more likely to be created, maintained, and destroyed on the output side of the political system than on the input side.<sup>5</sup> Nondemocratic regimes may enjoy a high level of

political support—even while denying rights to the people—if such regimes can deliver economic well-being and good governance.<sup>6</sup> By the same token, mechanisms of popular accountability and democratic representation do not immunize democracies against poor economic performance and bad governance.

The second explanation suggests that regime legitimacy stems not just from the effectiveness of the political system but also from the prevailing political predisposition of the public. Perhaps the contentious character of democratic politics nurtures “critical citizens” who are less satisfied with their regimes than people living in nondemocracies.<sup>7</sup> It is also conceivable that some nondemocratic regimes enjoy a higher level of political support due to two basic conditions: First, with the opposition and independent media effectively suppressed and all political space occupied by the state, viable political alternatives are lacking in nondemocracies. Second, the bulk of the populace in authoritarian countries is uncritical, deferential, and compliant. In this sense, political culture matters, and legitimacy is in the eyes of the beholders.

Our analysis rigorously and empirically tests these alternative explanations. Southeast Asia—home to a wide range of political regimes, from one-party authoritarian systems to liberal democracies—provides an important testing ground. Our findings strongly support the argument that regular and competitive elections in and of themselves do *not* serve as the main pillar for creating and sustaining legitimacy in emerging democracies. Moreover, our data show that political legitimacy in these countries depends at least as much on the quality of governance as on the provision of material goods.

In addition, our empirical findings register an important qualification to the prevailing view that the resiliency of Southeast Asian nondemocratic regimes results primarily from their superior ability to deliver economic prosperity. Regime support in these countries stems less from economic performance and more from citizens’ perceptions that the government is responsive to their needs, effective at controlling corruption, and fair and equal in its treatment of ordinary people. Furthermore, ideology and culture are also important sources for the legitimacy of nondemocratic regimes, which bolster their popular support by cultivating nationalism and national identity. These regimes also benefit from being rooted in hospitable cultural soil where traditional social and political values still enjoy strong support. Although popular political convictions matter to all types of regimes in the region, this is more strongly the case in nondemocracies than in democracies.

Over the last two decades, Southeast Asia has seen a number of regime transformations, though they have not all been in step with the global march toward democracy. During the period typically referred to as the “third wave” of democratization, only two countries in the region, the Philippines and Thailand, became democracies. By the mid-1990s,

most of the region was still governed by various forms of nondemocracy. Indonesia embarked on the path to democracy in 1998, a year after the Asian financial crisis that led to the downfall of the Suharto dictatorship. Yet the financial crisis did not spark such dramatic change elsewhere in the region, as authoritarian systems with greater resiliency, including those of Malaysia and Singapore, weathered calls for reform.

Although democracy had made greater inroads in Southeast Asia by the dawn of the twenty-first century, many governments in the region faced debilitating challenges, including political polarization, elite infighting, partisan gridlock, and corruption scandals. The first decade of the new century also saw worrisome signs of authoritarian backsliding, beginning in 2004 with the crackdown on dissent and consolidation of power by Cambodian strongman Hun Sen and a fraudulent presidential election in the Philippines, and continuing with the 2006 military coup and 2008 judicial coup in Thailand. In addition, China's robust economic success, replicated in Vietnam, served to reinforce the appeal of an authoritarian Asian model based on one-party rule. Even as new democracies such as Indonesia's became more consolidated, concerns about eroding political freedoms and entrenched elite rule grew.

Now, however, the authoritarian tide appears to be ebbing once again. Thailand and the Philippines held free and fair elections in 2010 and 2011, respectively. In both countries, democracy withstood grave challenges and arguably grew stronger. Recent elections in Malaysia (2008) and Singapore (2011) have also been more competitive, as these electoral authoritarian regimes now face greater internal challenges than in years past. Democratic forces in both countries are making headway. Civil society is expanding and elections are becoming more meaningful, gains that are tied in part to rising inequality, persistent concerns about corruption, ineffective public consultations, generational turnover, and shifting values.

Even the most authoritarian outposts have seen democratic openings. In 2011, Burma's long-ruling military junta at last began responding to intense domestic and international pressure for democratic reforms. In Vietnam, the exposure of corruption scandals in the country's state-owned firms has for the first time led the Communist government to engage the people, though the scope of this effort remains narrow.

Despite significant democratic advances in Southeast Asia, however, authoritarian forces remain entrenched in the region: Regime hard-liners in Malaysia and Vietnam, for example, fan nationalistic fervor and ethnic tensions in order to hold on to power, and rights violations (the suppression of free expression, free assembly, and religious freedom, among others) remain serious. The threats to freedom increasingly come from nonstate actors as well—as illustrated by the 2011 attacks on religious freedom in Indonesia—a circumstance which broadens the scope of challenges that the region's democracies must face.

Meanwhile, information and communication technologies are providing opportunities for democratic activists while at the same time creating new difficulties. In recent years, the Internet and social media have provided alternative sources of information, lowered the cost of political participation, and increased the mobilizing capacity of opposition forces. In addition, conflicts are taking place more and more online nowadays, and bloggers are often the front-line combatants.

In short, while there has been democratic expansion in Southeast Asia, serious obstacles remain. It is in this context that we systematically examine levels of regime support and the underlying factors that explain regime legitimacy in seven Southeast Asian countries—Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam—using data collected in the second and third waves of the ABS, conducted in 2005–2007 and 2010–2012, respectively.

These seven countries represent a wide range of regimes. According to Larry Diamond's regime-classification scheme presented in these pages in his April 2002 essay "Elections Without Democracy: Thinking About Hybrid Regimes," Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand in 2010 all qualified as *electoral democracies*—regimes in which free and fair elections are institutionalized, but political and legal obstacles to rights and freedoms remain significant. Malaysia that same year ranked among the *competitive authoritarian* regimes—those in which the freedom, fairness, inclusiveness, and meaningfulness of elections were greatly compromised, but significant parliamentary opposition existed. Singapore and Cambodia, meanwhile, fell into the *noncompetitive (hegemonic) authoritarian* category—regimes dominated by a hegemonic ruling party. Finally, Vietnam was a typical *one-party authoritarian* regime—that is, the space for political contestation is completely closed, and the Communist Party continues to monopolize politics. This diversity of cases within a single region allows us to compare the factors underlying regime support across the four distinctive regime types that today account for the bulk of political systems not only in Southeast Asia, but throughout the developing world.<sup>8</sup>

## A Comprehensive Analytical Framework

In the context of Southeast Asia, alternative sources for creating and maintaining regime legitimacy can be grouped together under four different rubrics—government performance, good governance, democratic development, and values and ideology (which here does not include democratic values and ideology). These categories are listed in Table 1 below, along with the specific indicators that compose them.<sup>9</sup>

**Government performance.** In Southeast Asia, regime legitimacy has always been tied to the output of governments, including economic performance, public-service delivery, the enforcement of law and order,

TABLE 1—EXPLANATIONS OF REGIME SUPPORT

Rubric	Indicators
Government Performance	Condition of national economy Access to public services Safety and crime control Government responsiveness
Good Governance	Controlling corruption Rule of law Horizontal accountability Fair and equal treatment
Democratic Development	Freedom Popular (electoral) accountability Political competition Perceived democratic progress
Values and Ideology	Political traditionalism Social traditionalism Nationalism

and the government's overall responsiveness to the people's needs. In other words, regime legitimacy depends on what governments do.

They are judged above all on their effectiveness at delivering jobs, prosperity, and price stability. Some Southeast Asian regimes are admired for their robust economic performance, as exemplified by the development-oriented states of Singapore and Malaysia from the 1960s to the 1980s. Indeed, people in Southeast Asia have traditionally equated development-oriented strongman leaders such as Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew and Indonesia's Suharto with their respective regimes. By contrast, economic crises and mismanagement can destabilize regimes, as happened in Indonesia in 1998. Also important is the provision of public services, along with public safety and crime control. Finally, citizens evaluate regimes on their overall responsiveness to citizen demands and their capacity to address the problems that people care about most.

We expect the factors identified under the rubric of *government performance* to be extremely powerful explanations for regime support across the region, and more so in authoritarian systems than in electoral democracies.

**Good governance.** In Southeast Asia, it is increasingly unlikely that political regimes can win over their citizens merely by delivering tangible goods; people also want their governments to exhibit integrity. Recent studies have shown that one of the most important factors shaping East Asians' perceptions of regimes is corruption.<sup>10</sup> From the corruption charges levied against Thailand's former premier Thaksin Shinawatra and former Filipino president Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo to the cries of cronyism in Malaysia and Indonesia, corruption has been a focal point for popular discontent. In addition to honesty (in the sense of officials eschewing gross corruption), people place a high value on the rule of law and mechanisms of horizontal accountability (which typically

means effective checks placed on executive power by judges and legislators). These desired arrangements establish a self-restraining state and minimize the abuses of power to which officeholders are prone.

Socioeconomic equality and fair treatment by the state are also essential to regime legitimacy, especially in the eyes of disadvantaged groups as well as racial, ethnic, and religious minorities. As disparities widen across the region, due in part to well-connected elites lining their own pockets, the ability of governments to redress economic exclusion is especially salient.

There is, of course, no guarantee that democratically elected governments will have greater integrity or be better able to meet key good-governance indicators than nondemocratic governments. According to the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators, Singapore and Malaysia are much better at controlling corruption and upholding the rule of law than are Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand.<sup>11</sup> Popular assessments of good governance may also play a role in explaining why nondemocratic regimes sometimes enjoy higher levels of political support than do democracies.

**Democratic development.** Although democracy has yet to become the "only game in town" in every corner of Southeast Asia, it is increasingly hard for regimes of any type to gain and exert political authority without at least some of the standard institutional trappings of representative democracy. These include regular elections, multiparty competition, independent media, and freedom of expression and association.

Why must even nondemocratic regimes apply such democratic "window dressing"? First, few if any Southeast Asian regimes will be able to defy the transformative forces of modernization in the long run. Modernization theory holds that resistance to democratic change will become increasingly untenable.<sup>12</sup> Rising levels of economic development necessarily lead to growing mass demands for liberalization in authoritarian societies and for higher levels of mass participation in societies that are already democratic. Second, as most Southeast Asian societies are now enmeshed in the global economy and the international community, they are also more open than ever to external pressures and criticism. Regimes that openly reject the formal institutions of representation, popular accountability, and expression suffer a substantial loss of external legitimacy in the contemporary global ideological arena.

With the exception of Vietnam, all Southeast Asian regimes covered by the ABS formally commit themselves to the principle of popular accountability and open political contestation. In competitive authoritarian systems (Malaysia) and hegemonic authoritarian regimes (Singapore), incumbents may routinely manipulate formal democratic rules and effectively deny the opposition a level playing field, but they cannot eliminate opposition forces entirely or even reduce them to sham parties. Regimes that fulfill citizens' aspirations for protection of ba-



sic freedoms, popular accountability, fair and open political contestation, and overall democratic progress are likely to enjoy higher levels of popular support. These evaluations are particularly important in young democracies, which are expected to meet core democratic standards.

**Values and ideology.** In the 1990s, the debate about “Asian values” and their impact on the popular understanding of politics in East Asia took center stage in international discussions about democratization in the region. Are Asian values—which are said to stress political order and authority and to favor collective rather than individualistic views regarding families, groups, and work units—incompatible with democracy?

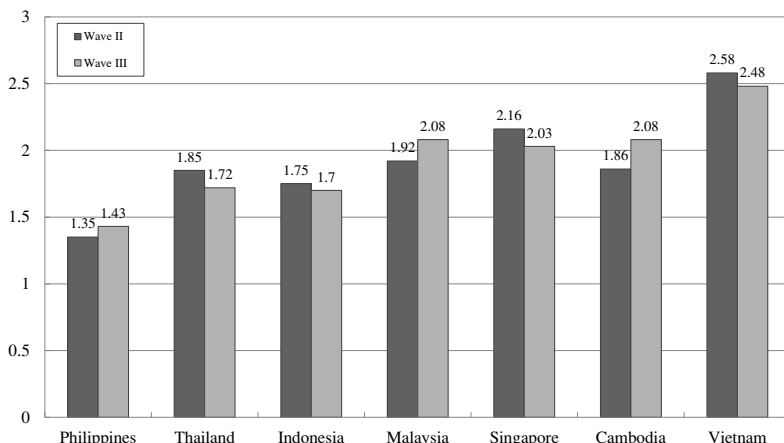
Asian values have been explicitly linked to popular support for non-democratic regimes in the region. The ABS survey examines two different dimensions of Asian values: 1) social traditionalism, which encompasses traditional family, interpersonal, and work-related values and ethics; and 2) authoritarian values, which embrace support for paternalistic political authority and a “harmonious” social order.<sup>13</sup> In addition, we look at patriotism in order to see whether regimes gain support by promoting nationalism and national identity. This is an important consideration, as many Southeast Asian regimes earned their right to rule, at least initially, on the basis of their credentials as leaders of anticolonial and national-independence struggles.

Finally, our measurement of regime support consists of two components: The first is *support for regime institutions*, a crucial element of regime legitimacy,<sup>14</sup> which we measure according to the degree of trust in the actual institutions of government (the executive, parliament, the judiciary, the military, and the like). In our analysis, the level of support for regime institutions is calculated by averaging the degree of trust in the various institutions so that this measure is not tied to trust in a specific body or bodies, but rather indicates trust in the system as a whole.

The second component is *diffuse regime support*, as defined by David Easton.<sup>15</sup> The third-wave ABS questionnaire designed a series of questions asking respondents about their allegiance to, preference for, and pride and confidence in their own respective systems of government. The ABS has made a point of guiding respondents to differentiate the *system* of government from the specific government in office or its performance.<sup>16</sup> This specially designed battery of questions is not tied to the concept of democratic legitimacy and thus enables us to make a systematic comparison of levels of legitimacy across different regime types.

Through this analytical framework, we are able to ask three important sets of questions. *First*, what are the levels of regime support in Southeast Asia, and do they vary across regime types and over time? *Second*, what are the common factors that explain regime support across Southeast Asia, and what do they tell us about how people in the region view their systems of government? Do values and ideology, for exam-

**FIGURE—CHANGES IN SUPPORT FOR REGIME INSTITUTIONS BETWEEN ABS WAVE II (2005–2007) AND III (2010–2012)**



ple, explain regime support more than do quality of governance or level of democratic development? Alternatively, does economic performance trump other factors? These questions address the core debates on the role of values versus economic performance in shaping perceptions of regimes in the region. *Third*, are the reasons for popular regime support different in different types of regimes? Do democratic regimes draw their legitimacy from different sources than do authoritarian regimes? These three questions—the level of regime support, the common underlying factors of regime support across regime types, and the different underlying factors in different regime types—help us to understand regime legitimacy in Southeast Asia.

### Level of Support for Regime Institutions

The last two waves of the ABS survey found that all regimes in Southeast Asia except for the Philippines enjoyed considerable overall citizen trust in their institutions. The Figure above shows that, on a scale from 0 to 3, most regimes received an average score of more than 1.5 in both waves, indicating that a majority of citizens placed considerable trust in the actual institutions of government. Strikingly, however, the authoritarian countries enjoy higher levels of institutional support than do the democratic ones. Vietnam—a one-party authoritarian regime—registered the highest level of support in both waves, while the Philippines—an electoral democracy—registered the lowest. Singapore, Malaysia, and Cambodia consistently outperformed the three electoral democracies—the Philippines, Thailand, and Indonesia—by a significant margin. The former group averaged 2.2 over the two waves, while the latter averaged 1.7 in the second wave (2005–2007) and 1.6 in the

third (2010–12). The third wave of ABS data reveals a similar pattern across different regime types on the diffuse-regime-support measurement.<sup>17</sup>

As the Figure shows, popular support for regime institutions has not fluctuated significantly over time. Most changes are around a magnitude of 0.2. Upon closer scrutiny, however, one can still detect some marginal but meaningful changes in the level of support over the last few years in several of the surveyed countries. These changes are largely linked to major sociopolitical developments.

In the Philippines, for instance, popular support for regime institutions has rebounded from the low experienced during the Arroyo presidency (2001–10) and has continued to climb since the free and fair 2010 election and the inauguration of a more consultative president, Benigno S. Aquino III. Visible strides on several key policy matters (economic growth, antipoverty efforts, reduction of factional violence, and the like) have helped as well.

In Thailand, by contrast, the overall level of institutional trust dipped during the tumultuous years from 2006 through 2010, which saw a military coup, judicial interference in the electoral process, and moves to limit Internet freedom. During this period, polarization of the electorate between the red-shirted backers of ousted premier Thaksin Shinawatra and their yellow-shirted adversaries turned increasingly violent and eventually resulted in the May 2010 military crackdown and killings of red-shirt protestors. In Indonesia, meanwhile, even as the country's democratic transition has widened the space for civil society in general, the government struggles to control corruption and guarantee freedom of the press and religion.

In Cambodia, popular support for regime institutions grew between 2008 and 2012, as Hun Sen, taking advantage of a weak and increasingly divided opposition and his own party's ability to dole out patronage in the countryside, consolidated his position during a period of strong economic growth. In Vietnam, citizens' exceptionally high level of support for regime institutions began to show signs of weakening between 2007 and 2011 as the country's economic momentum waned, income inequality began to widen, corruption persisted, and scandals erupted frequently.

Singapore's dip in support for regime institutions in the third wave stems from socioeconomic, immigration, and other challenges that the regime has faced in recent years. In response, the government has had to loosen its grip on civil society and respect Internet freedom, while also addressing the growing popular backlash against the massive influx of new immigrants, which has "diluted" the uniqueness of being Singaporean and put added pressure on public services.

To summarize, then, support for regime institutions in the Philippines is the lowest among the surveyed countries, but is on the rise. In Indonesia, a steady majority supports regime institutions. In Malaysia, as the

TABLE 2—COMPARATIVE EXPLANATORY STRENGTH OF SOURCES OF REGIME SUPPORT

	Southeast Asia	Philippines	Thailand	Indonesia	Malaysia	Singapore	Cambodia	Vietnam
Nationalism	0.09	-	0.11	0.10	0.07	<b>0.25</b>	0.06	0.14
Social Traditionalism	0.07	0.11	0.12	0.05	0.08	<b>0.15</b>	0.11	0.09
Political Traditionalism	0.11	0.10	0.09	0.13	0.07	<b>0.15</b>	<b>0.15</b>	0.13
Political Competition	0.10	0.06	-	0.10	<b>0.15</b>	-	0.14	0.12
Horizontal Accountability	0.09	-	<b>0.15</b>	0.14	0.10	-	0.07	<b>0.16</b>
Equal Treatment	0.14	<b>0.15</b>	-	0.10	<b>0.17</b>	0.11	0.10	0.08
Rule of Law	0.11	0.08	-	0.06	0.08	0.10	0.12	0.13
Controlling Corruption	<b>0.21</b>	0.14	0.11	0.12	<b>0.18</b>	0.08	<b>0.19</b>	<b>0.19</b>
Government Responsiveness	<b>0.16</b>	0.14	<b>0.28</b>	<b>0.22</b>	0.13	0.10	0.14	0.12
Access to Services	0.10	0.10	<b>0.16</b>	0.12	0.08	0.13	<b>0.16</b>	-
Economic Performance	<b>0.18</b>	<b>0.22</b>	<b>0.20</b>	<b>0.20</b>	<b>0.20</b>	0.07	0.10	0.08

*Note:* All numbers are standardized regression coefficients. Those equal to or greater than 0.15 are boldfaced to highlight the more significant explanatory variables.  
*Source:* Asian Barometer Survey, Wave III.

opposition has forced a political opening and gained electoral strength, people are embracing what is now a more pluralistic system and support for regime institutions has shot up. Even in Cambodia, where there has been a slight increase in support for regime institutions, the electorate is divided in its support for Hun Sen’s government. Meanwhile, the seemingly higher level of support for regime institutions under authoritarian systems is no longer as robust as it once was. In Singapore and Vietnam, third-wave levels of institutional support have dipped slightly from their first-wave levels.

There is no question that the exceptionally high level of support for regime institutions observed in the more authoritarian systems has something to do with the latters’ relative freedom from independent media scrutiny and the lack of genuine political opposition. On the other hand, it would be an oversimplification to assume that these systems enjoy higher levels of political support simply because they are authoritarian. We need to dig deeper into the underlying factors that account for the varying levels of regime legitimacy, both within a given political system and across different types of regimes.

Sources of Regime Legitimacy

Table 2 above shows the relative explanatory power of various sources of regime support in the region as a whole, as well as for each of the seven countries.<sup>18</sup> Across the region’s political systems, there is a strik-

ing commonality in terms of underlying factors for sustaining regime legitimacy. Of the fifteen indicators that had been identified in Table 1 on page 154, eleven turned out to be statistically significant when it comes

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***The more a Singaporean subscribes to nationalism, patriotism, traditional political values, and traditional social values, or any combination thereof, the more likely he or she will be to embrace the existing political system.***

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to explaining the level of regime support across the region. These are the eleven indicators in Table 2 on page 159, and they cluster around three categories: values and ideology, good governance, and government performance.

The pattern is similar across regime types. First, all statistically significant indicators in all seven countries exert their influence in the same direction—that is, strengthening rather than weakening regime legitimacy. Second, most of the eleven

indicators that are statistically significant at the regional level also turn out to be important sources of regime legitimacy at the country level, although the explanatory strength of each indicator varies across countries. In Indonesia, Malaysia, and Cambodia, all eleven indicators are statistically significant (at a 0.05 probability level); in the Philippines and Vietnam, ten are statistically significant; in Singapore, nine; in Thailand, eight. In the case of Singapore, because the political-competition indicator is not statistically significant, we can conclude that a perceived lack of open and free political contestation has little impact on regime legitimacy. In fact, many of our Singaporean respondents recognized that the opposition was denied a level playing field, but did not consider this to be as important as other factors.

All three aspects of *government performance*—namely, the condition of the national economy, the government's perceived responsiveness to people's needs, and access to public services—are important sources of regime legitimacy. Collectively, they exert more explanatory power than *any* other category of explanatory variable for *all* Southeast Asian regimes except Singapore's. Economic performance and governmental responsiveness are two of the most important reasons for differences in the level of political support among citizens of the electoral democracies (Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand) and the one competitive authoritarian regime (Malaysia). The influence of partisanship, of course, shades electorates' views on these indicators, making them much more diverse and divergent than the views of those who live under hegemonic authoritarian regimes such as those found in Singapore and Cambodia.

Most indicators under the rubric of *good governance* are also important pillars for sustaining regime legitimacy across all politi-

cal systems. The collective explanatory power of these indicators is almost on par with that of *government-performance* indicators. In particular, corruption control and equal treatment are consistently among the top explanatory variables across the region. In the Philippines and Malaysia, they are the top two explanatory variables after economic performance. Across regime types, people who believed that their regime was providing basic necessities to all people and treating everyone fairly and equally regardless of wealth, status, or ethnicity supported their regime more strongly. Given the growing socioeconomic inequality in the region, this issue is not surprisingly becoming a major concern.

In the case of Malaysia, closer scrutiny of our data shows that ethnic minorities tend to hold more critical views of the regime on the issue of fair and equal treatment than do most Malays (the dominant majority in the country), and these minority groups likewise show less support for the regime. Popular perceptions regarding the government's commitment to the rule of law and success at corruption control are key factors in determining regime support among the citizens of Cambodia and Vietnam.

The three indicators under the rubric of *values and ideology*—nationalism, social traditionalism, and political traditionalism—perform rather differently than the previous two categories of explanatory variables. Collectively, they exert much less explanatory power in the region as a whole than either *government performance* or *good governance*. Yet in the case of Singapore, the three predispositions together form the most important pillar of regime legitimacy. Their collective explanatory power trumps both *government performance* and *good governance*. The more a Singaporean subscribes to nationalism, patriotism, traditional political values, and traditional social values, or any combination thereof, the more likely he or she will be to embrace the existing political system. This explains why the incumbent elite in Singapore has been so preoccupied with constructing a public discourse of national pride and Asian values. The variant pattern of regime support in Singapore also helps us to understand the country's "exceptionalism," as the regime has relied on a combination of values and national identity rather than only economic prosperity to buttress its position as an authoritarian outlier among higher-income countries.

Nationalism is also an important pillar of regime legitimacy for the Vietnamese one-party regime, which benefits from its roots in the anti-imperialist struggle and its success at reunifying the country after a bitter war. Our data also show that the prevalence of traditional political values in the three Southeast Asian societies that are less developed—Cambodia, Indonesia, and Vietnam—tends to load the dice in favor of the existing political regime regardless of its level of democratic development.

To our surprise, under the rubric of *democratic development*, only po-

litical competition—that is, whether electoral contestation is perceived to be open and fair—has any bearing on the level of regime legitimacy. The remaining three indicators—freedom, popular (electoral) accountability, and perceived democratic progress over the last decade—are not

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***The strong tie between regime support and good-governance indicators such as corruption control and fair and equal treatment puts pressure on Southeast Asian governments to address these issues more effectively.***

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statistically significant in explaining the level of regime support across the region or in most of the seven surveyed countries.<sup>19</sup> This is a sobering observation for emerging democracies. It suggests that, all else being equal, putting in place the basics of representative democracy will not bring a regime any significant advantage in popular support above and beyond what a nondemocratic regime could expect to glean.

Our empirical analysis shows both commonalities and variations in the sources of regime support in Southeast Asian countries. Most regimes in the region draw political legitimacy from perceptions that their governance is effective and marked by integrity. These findings lend support to the argument that regime legitimacy—when it is won and when it is lost—is rooted in the output side of the political system.

Yet delivering economic prosperity alone will not suffice. In order for political regimes in Southeast Asia to win over their people, they must control corruption, respect the rule of law, treat all citizens fairly and equally, expand public services, and be responsive to what the people need. The region's young democracies are not exempt from these requirements. In the case of the Philippines, which scored the lowest on our regime-legitimacy index, the system consistently failed to live up to these expectations, at least until the most recent presidential cycle.

The strong tie between regime support and good-governance indicators such as corruption control and fair and equal treatment puts pressure on Southeast Asian governments to address these issues more effectively. Corruption has always been a serious problem in the region, and most countries are still failing to handle it adequately. Likewise, as governments grapple with how to manage growing social disparities, socioeconomic equality and fair treatment remain elusive for many Southeast Asians. At some point, these problems could threaten to undermine regime support.

Finally, our analysis reveals a correlation between regime type and sources of legitimacy. Nationalism and traditional values continue to be important for one-party systems and hegemonic authoritarian regimes.

Southeast Asia's authoritarian regimes depend for their legitimacy and resiliency on their ability to keep up their remarkable records of suppressing political contestation and cultivating nondemocratic convictions and values among their citizens. Yet these very tools also make nondemocratic regimes in the region increasingly vulnerable, as the popular forces unleashed by the revolution in information and communications technologies threaten to weaken the influence of traditional values.

## NOTES

1. Bruce Gilley, *The Right to Rule: How States Win and Lose Legitimacy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

2. William Mishler and Richard Rose, "Learning and Re-learning Regime Support: The Dynamics of Post-Communist Regimes," *European Journal of Political Research* 41 (January 2002): 5–36.

3. The Asian Barometer survey (ABS) is the region's first collaborative initiative to develop a regional network of democracy studies based on surveying ordinary citizens. Between 2001 and 2012, the ABS implemented three rounds of comparative surveys in East Asia. Its first-round survey covered eight East Asian countries and territories—China, Hong Kong, Japan, Mongolia, the Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand. We broadened the second-round survey to include Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Cambodia. All ABS data were collected through face-to-face interviews of randomly selected eligible voters in each participating country. For details, see [www.asianbarometer.org](http://www.asianbarometer.org).

4. Pippa Norris, *Democratic Deficit: Critical Citizens Revisited* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Peter Kotzian, "Public Support for Liberal Democracy," *International Political Science Review* 32 (January 2011): 23–41; Zhengxu Wang, Russell J. Dalton, and Doh Chull Shin, "Political Trust, Political Performance, and Support for Democracy," in Dalton and Shin, eds., *Citizens, Democracy, and Markets Around the Pacific Rim: Congruence Theory and Political Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 50–72.

5. Bo Rothstein, "Creating Political Legitimacy: Electoral Democracy versus Quality of Government," *American Behavioral Scientist* 53 (November 2009): 311–30.

6. For example, Bruce Gilley, "The Determinants of State Legitimacy: Results for 72 Countries," *International Political Science Review* 27 (January 2006): 47–71.

7. Russell J. Dalton, *Democratic Challenges, Democratic Choices: The Erosion of Political Support in Advanced Industrial Democracies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

8. The only distinctive regime type identified by Larry Diamond but not present in our analysis is "liberal democracy."

9. In the analytical framework that follows, we consciously leave out charismatic leaders as a possible source of regime legitimacy, since charismatic authority can only be mobilized to gain initial legitimacy during special political (usually founding) moments. In the countries studied here, such moments have long passed. See Muthiah Alagappa, "The Anatomy of Legitimacy," in Alagappa, ed., *Political Legitimacy in Southeast Asia: The Quest for Moral Authority* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995): 11–30.



10. Eric C.C. Chang and Yun-han Chu, "Corruption and Trust: Exceptionalism in East Asian Democracies," *Journal of Politics* 68 (May 2006): 259–71.

11. See the World Bank Group's Worldwide Governance Indicators at <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.asp>.

12. Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel, *Modernization, Cultural Change, and Democracy: The Human Development Sequence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

13. For an elaboration of how ABS conceptualizes and measures traditional social and political values in the East Asian context, see Yun-han Chu, "The Evolution of Political Values," in Bruce Gilley and Larry Diamond, eds., *Political Change in China: Comparison with Taiwan* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2008).

14. Dalton, *Democratic Challenges, Democratic Choices*; Norris, *Democratic Deficit*.

15. David Easton, *A Framework for Political Analysis* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965).

16. The ABS questionnaire employed the following five-item battery to measure diffuse regime support: 1) Over the long run, our system of government is capable of solving the problems our country faces; 2) thinking in general, I am proud of our system of government; 3) a system like ours, even if it runs into problems, deserves the people's support; 4) I would rather live under our system of government than any other that I can think of; 5) compared with other systems in the world, would you say our system of government works fine as it is, needs minor change, needs major change, or should be replaced? See [www.asianbarometer.org/newenglish/surveys/SurveyTopics\\_wave2.htm](http://www.asianbarometer.org/newenglish/surveys/SurveyTopics_wave2.htm).

17. The battery that we employed to measure diffuse regime support in ABS Wave II was not as comprehensive as the one designed for ABS Wave III, so that we are not able to produce a comparable figure showing changes in the former over time.

18. In our regression analysis, the dependent variable is the composite index of regime legitimacy, which combines the index of "support for regime institutions" with that of "diffuse regime support." For independent variables, in addition to the fifteen indicators identified in Table I, we also include the following control variables: gender, age, education, income level, residence (rural or urban), political interest, and social trust.

19. The only exception to this generalization is the finding that the perceived democratic backsliding did have some negative impact on regime legitimacy in the case of Thailand.